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FM AMEMBASSY RIYADH
TO RUCPDO/DEPT OF COMMERCE WASHDC PRIORITY
RUEHC/SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 9997
INFO RUEHXX/ARAB ISRAELI COLLECTIVE
RUEHXM/GULF COOPERATION COUNCIL COLLECTIVE
RUEATRS/DEPT OF TREASURY WASHDC
RHEHNSC/NSC WASHDC

C O N F I D E N T I A L RIYADH 000192

SIPDIS

DEPT FOR EEB, NEA/ARP, AND NEA/IPA
COMMERCE FOR ITA AND BIS/OFFICE OF ANTIBOYCOTT COMPLIANCE
TREASURY FOR OFFICE OF THE GENERAL COUNSEL

E.O. 12958: DECL: 09/17/2017

TAGS: [ECON](#) [ETRD](#) [EINV](#) [EFIN](#) [KWBG](#) [KBCT](#) [KPAL](#) [SA](#) [IS](#)

SUBJECT: CALLS FOR ANTI-AMERICAN BOYCOTT CONTINUE, MIXED
REVIEWS FROM RELIGIOUS LEADERS

REF: A. RIYADH 71

[B](#). RIYADH 17

[C](#). 06 RIYADH 787

Classified By: Charge D'Affaires David Rundell for reasons 1.4 (b) and (d).

[1](#). (C) Summary: Despite the cease-fire between Israel and Hamas, Saudi public anger over perceived U.S. support for Israel's military actions in Gaza continues to simmer, and a grassroots campaign to boycott U.S. products remains ongoing for the moment, particularly among the youth population. Local press reported a few local vendors have been affected by the movement. Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al Sheikh, Saudi's highest ranking cleric, publicly denounced boycotting the United States, while other religious leaders have countered the Grand Mufti's statement, claiming that the boycott of American goods is an obligation under Shari'a. End summary.

[2](#). (C) Saudi public outrage over Israel's strikes in Gaza continues to be reflected in a grassroots movement calling for a boycott of U.S. products and firms. Such calls are being spread primarily via websites, email, and text-messaging, thus reaching broad swaths of Saudi youths (ref A). Students at King Saud University reportedly said the movement is "popular at the University" and that they had stopped frequenting Starbucks and McDonald's. Although some businesses have reported anecdotally that they are feeling the impact of the boycott, it is likely much of the loss is attributable to the recession here. Services and business-to-business dealings do not appear to be affected in any significant way by the boycott.

[3](#). (C) Grand Mufti Sheikh Abdul Aziz Al Sheikh, Saudi's highest ranking cleric (though independent, he is appointed by the King, receives a government salary, and the tone and message of his sermons often seems loosely correlated to SAG policy), denounced the boycott on January 24, saying in a lecture at a mosque that the boycott "doesn't serve any purpose." The Grand Mufti also criticized promoters of the movement as "noisemakers." The Mufti's remarks were met with anger by both public and religious voices outside of the Kingdom, most notably Hamam Saed of the Muslim Brotherhood in Jordan, who was quoted in the Arabic language daily Al-Hayat as reiterating that it is the duty of every Muslim to boycott American products in solidarity with the victims in Gaza. To date the SAG has not commented on this most recent call to boycott the United States.

[4](#). (C) Comment: So far the boycott appears to be more rhetoric than reality, and has had little noticeable effect

on businesses. Despite the remarks by the Grand Mufti, the SAG has not released an official statement regarding the movement. The Saudis understand that letting pressure vent in this way is the best way to relieve it. End Comment.
RUNDELL